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ABSTRACT

This paper presents implications of the path analysis procedures used to interpret data from a study of urban special education teachers' perceptions of working conditions. The analysis looked at a broad range of factors that could affect teacher plans to leave the field. An overall finding emerging from the analysis was that the same fundamental relationships among variables held in all three study cities. Other major findings included: (1) principal support is critical to job satisfaction and is associated with stronger teacher commitment to special education and a lower likelihood of leaving; (2) perceived opportunities for professional growth are influenced by both central administration and building principals; (3) role conflict and a sense of weakened autonomy are strongly related to stress and to teacher satisfaction with the current assignment; and (4) intent to leave the field of special education is strongly influenced by commitment to the field and special education experience. Figures illustrate the path analyses for each of these four findings. (DB)

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ED 389 151

WORKING PAPER # 6

Impact of Job Design Problems and Lack of Support

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Understanding the Relationship Between Job Design Problems, Support, and Attrition/Retention of Special Educators: Findings From a Path Analysis

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Eugene Research Institute

May 12, 1995
DRAFT VERSION

FACT SHEET

Understanding the Relationship Between Job Design Problems, Support, and Attrition/Retention of Special Educators:
Findings From a Path Analysis

The following are some implications of the path analysis procedures that were used to interpret retention survey data. These statistical procedures allow for identification of important relationships among aspects of job design, support, appraisals of stress, commitment to the field of special education, and intent to leave.

Path analyses were performed on data from samples of special educators from three very different urban districts in the West. The analysis looked at a broad range of factors that could affect plans to leave the field.

An important overall point emerging from the analysis is that for this path model, *the same fundamental relationships among variables hold in three different cities..*

Because of the complexity of the overall path model, portions of the model and related findings are presented in excerpted fashion below. The path coefficients presented in the diagrams are drawn from the largest of the three districts and were chosen for their representativeness of findings. They are, in virtually all cases, closely replicated in the other two districts.

FINDINGS

1. *Principal support* is critical to all essential aspects of job satisfaction. This support encompasses:

   a. a principal who assists in problem solving
   b. feeling backed up by the principal in both integration of special ed students and discipline issues
   c. feeling understood by the principal
   d. feeling included in what goes on in the school.

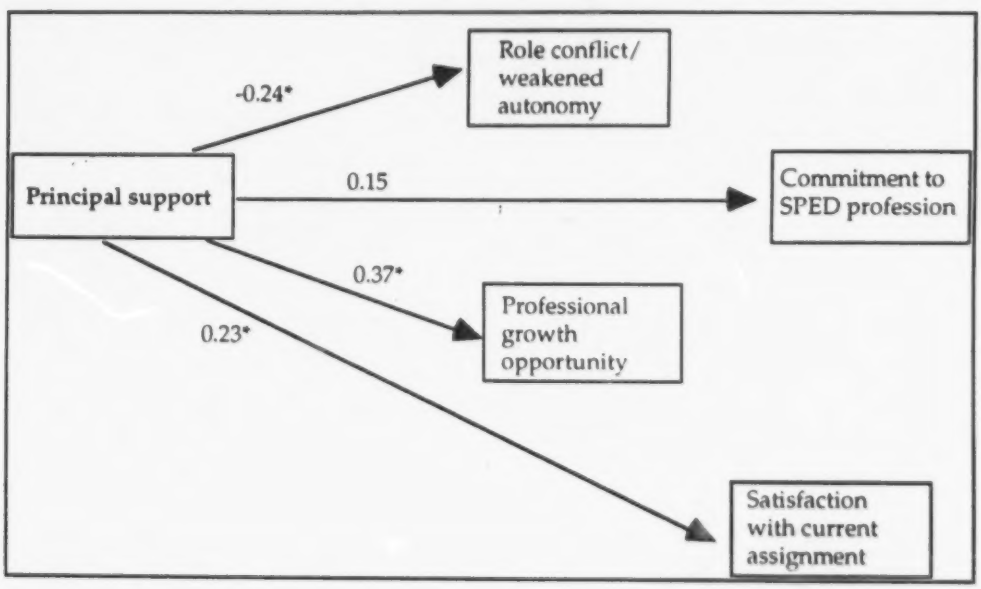
Perceptions by teachers of high levels of principal support (see Figure 1) are associated with :

- *stronger commitment* to the field of special education

- a sense of greater professional development opportunities to learn new things on the job
- stronger feelings of professional trust and autonomy
- a belief that there is an integration of various job components and that these components are congruent with teachers' personal philosophies.

Through its impact on the four areas identified in Figure 1, principal support *lowers* the likelihood that a special educator would plan on leaving.

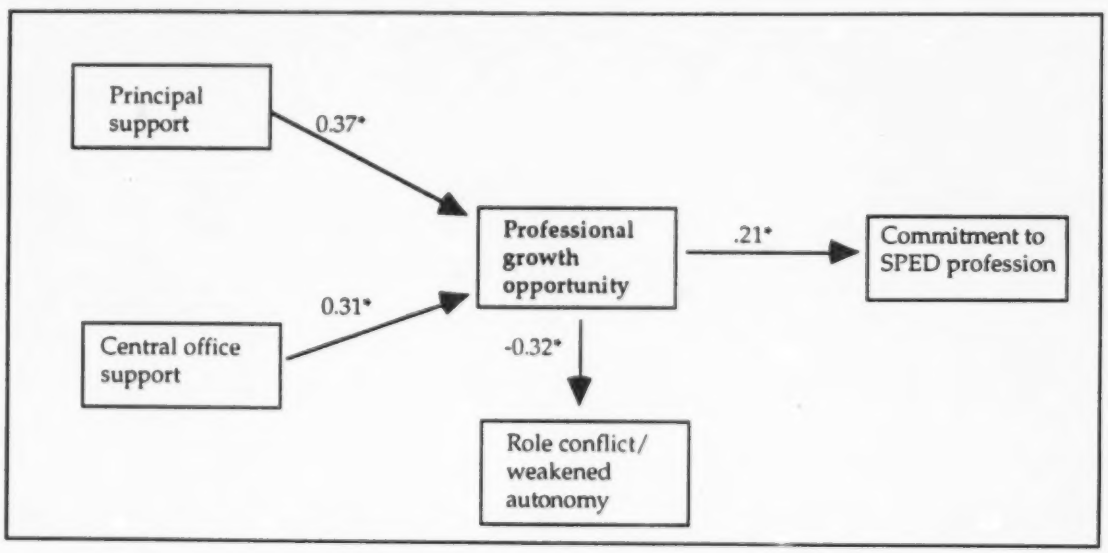
Figure 1. The Impact of Principal Support



2. Perceived *opportunities for professional growth* are influenced by both central administration and building principal. This, too, is a critical factor in understanding individuals' commitment to the field. This construct encompasses satisfaction with opportunities for leaving and growth on the job

When special educators feel they are provided with growth opportunities, they experience less conflict and confusion about their role and feel more autonomy. By and large, lack of growth opportunities constitutes a major source of dissatisfaction.

Figure 2 . Role of Opportunities for Professional Growth



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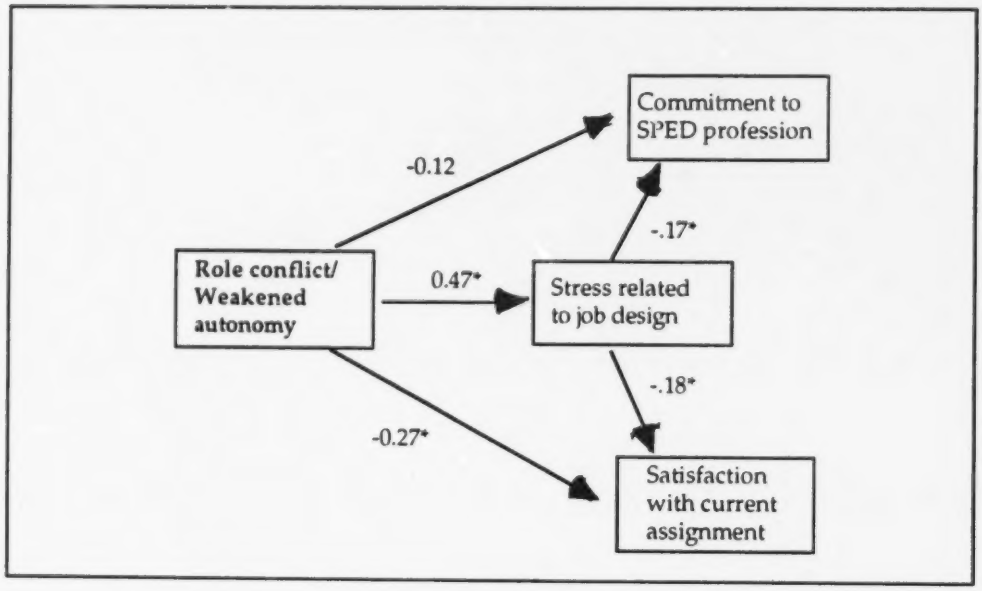
3. *Role conflict/Weakened autonomy* (see Figure 3) is strongly related to stress and to satisfaction with current assignment. As expected, chronic stress lowers commitment to the field and satisfaction with current assignment to similar degrees.

One of the benefits of a path analysis diagram is that it facilitates the examination of *indirect* relationships among variables in addition to direct effects. An example of this may be seen in Figure 4, where the direct relationship between role problems and commitment to the field is limited. However, a stronger indirect effect of role problems on commitment is apparent, acting through its effect on stress and, in turn, the inverse effect of stress on commitment.

Figure 3. Impact of Role Conflict/ Autonomy Problems

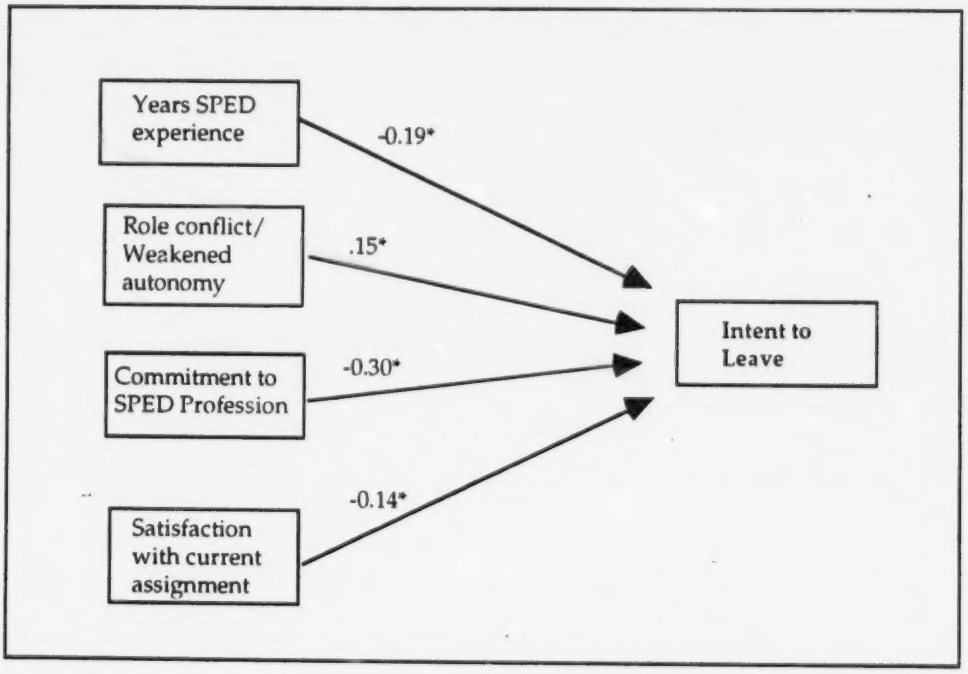


4. Not surprisingly, *intent to leave* the field of special education (see Figure 4) is strongly influenced by commitment to the field and special education experience. It is also affected to a lesser extent by satisfaction with current position and experience of role conflict.

- Less experienced teachers are somewhat *more* likely to leave.
- As one might expect, those with low commitment to the field or low satisfaction with current position are more likely to leave, as are those who experience greater role conflict.

It is important to reiterate that the path model consists of multiple highly interrelated variables, and that the "direct" effects on intent to leave in Figure 4 are, with the exception of experience, all influenced by the other variables in the model with which they share relationships.

Figure 4. Relationship of Experience, Committment, Role Conflict and Satisfaction, with Intent to Leave



Technical Notes

Only special education teachers age 55 and younger were included in the analysis, since we were most interested in what would cause individuals to leave the field earlier than typical retirement age. District sample sizes ranged from 169 to 243 special education teachers.

The theoretical framework guiding the analysis was influenced by the earlier work of Lawrence Cross and Bonnie Billingsley on special education attrition and the research of Susan Rosenholtz and Milbrey Wallis McLaughlin on workplace factors that enhance the quality of teachers' professional work.

The high level of replicability across samples increases confidence that the model may have external validity for special educators beyond those surveyed in this project. It is important to note however, given the relatively limited extant work in this area and the nature of causal modeling techniques, that other equally valid models may be constructed from the same data set. Hence these findings should be viewed as part of an evolving understanding of working conditions for special education teachers.

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